



Interior Health

**RECOMMENDED**

**HEAD LICE**

**MANAGEMENT**

## INTRODUCTION

**Head lice can affect anyone.** Head lice are annoying and may cause itching, but they do not transmit or cause disease. Children and adult's reactions to head lice can subject children to teasing, bullying and isolation. Reactions to head lice can significantly interfere with a child's emotional well-being, social status in the classroom and ability to learn. For these reasons, head lice infestations should be treated.

Current research shows that school exclusion, early dismissal and no-nit policies do not prevent or control head lice infestations. In fact, these practices further stigmatize children, erode their self-esteem and interfere with learning. No-nit policies in schools and daycares are discouraged by both the Canadian Pediatric Society and American Academy of Pediatrics.

## INTERIOR HEALTH AUTHORITY POSITION STATEMENT

**The Interior Health Authority does not support school exclusion, early dismissal and no-nit policies as these disrupt the education process and adversely affect children's self-esteem and social status in the classroom.**

**Due to frequent misdiagnosis and over diagnosis of head lice, school screening teams are not encouraged.**

### RATIONALE

- 1) Lice may be present on the scalp for weeks before they are discovered. Only 30 percent of individuals scratch their scalp when they have head lice. As children are often in the classroom for days or weeks before head lice are detected, there is no benefit in sending them home early.
- 2) Head lice infestations are often misdiagnosed. The presence of fluff or dandruff in the hair are often mistaken for nits. Also, the presence of nits does not mean a child has an active infestation. It is difficult to differentiate between nits and empty egg casings. Even under ideal conditions, 10-30% of nits do not hatch.
- 3) Head lice are frequently over diagnosed, which leads to overuse of pediculocides (chemical head lice products). Overuse of pediculocides can be hazardous to a child's health and can cause resistance.
- 4) Negative reactions to head lice adversely affect children by subjecting them to teasing and bullying.

## WHAT PARENTS CAN DO...

- Be aware of the symptoms of head lice and the treatment procedures.
- Check the heads of all family members on a weekly basis. Increase this to daily head checks when a case of head lice has occurred in your child's classroom or one of the family members has been in contact with head lice.
- Treat the infested heads.
- Refer to the Interior Health School Health Website at [www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca)
- Contact the Public Health Nurse when treatment has failed to rid your child's head of head lice.
- Teach your children not to share hair accessories, hats, coats, combs, brushes, etc. with others and tie back or braid your child's hair.

## WHAT THE SCHOOL CAN DO...

- Discuss with Public Health Nurse the management of head lice in schools.
- Develop an understanding of the symptoms of head lice infestation.
- Distribute classroom letters and treatment information to parents when head lice are identified.

See Appendix A for Sample School Letters.

See Appendix B for Sample School Newsletter Insert.

See Appendix C for School Screening Team Information.

## **WHAT THE PUBLIC HEALTH NURSE CAN DO...**

### **In the school:**

- Discuss the management of head lice in cooperation with the school principal, staff and parents.
- Determine if the school staff has an adequate knowledge of head lice and the control of infestations.
- Provide information as needed, including information on environmental control i.e. dress-up centers, cloak rooms, hanging jackets on the back of desk chairs.
- Receive referrals from school staff to follow-up treatment failures or other concerns pertaining to controlling/managing head lice.

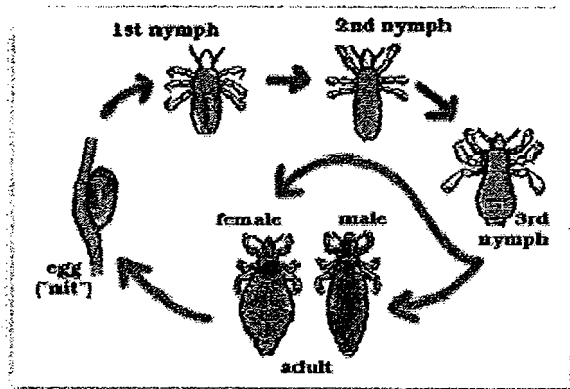
### **With families:**

- Group presentations about head lice and head lice control. This would be particularly effective with kindergarten parents early in the school year.
- Follow-up for treatment failures or other concerns pertaining to controlling/managing head lice ie: provision of information through written handouts, videos, or individual counseling.

## HEAD LICE FACTS

- Head lice do not spread disease.
- Head lice are tiny insects about the size of a sesame seed and can vary from white to brown in color.
- Head lice live only on a person's head and can only survive 1-2 days away from the scalp.
- Head lice do not jump or fly.
- Head lice can move quickly on dry hair, so they are difficult to see.
- Head lice bites can make the scalp itchy (but not always).

### Life Cycle of Head Lice



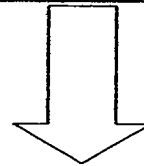
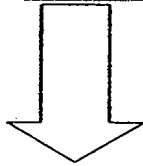
Permission requested from [www.headlice.org](http://www.headlice.org)

To see head lice photos click here: [www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html)

- Adult head lice lay about 5-6 eggs (called nits) every day. These nits are glued to the hair very close to the scalp (within 6mm or ¼ inch).
- It takes 7-10 days for the nits to hatch into a nymph.
- It takes 7-10 days for a nymph to become an adult. During that time, it stays on the head, but does not lay eggs.
- You can find nits anywhere on the head especially behind the ears or on the back of the neck.
- You can't get rid of nits by brushing, or with a hair dryer.
- After the head lice hatch, the shell of the nit stays glued to the hair. If it is more than 6 mm or ¼ inch away from the scalp, it is probably empty.
- You can get head lice by touching heads with someone who has head lice, or by sharing combs, brushes and hats.
- Head lice are common where children play or work closely together.

# HEAD LICE TREATMENT

## TWO ACCEPTABLE TREATMENT OPTIONS



### OPTION A:

#### Head Lice Shampoo

**Kill the Head Lice  
&  
Remove the Nits**

Special head lice shampoos/rinses are used because they have been tested and determined to be a safe and effective treatment

### OPTION B:

#### Wet-Combing

**Remove the Head Lice  
&  
Forget the Nits**

A non-chemical way to find and eliminate head lice.

Wet combing with hair conditioner immobilizes the lice.

*Note: the research to support this method is unclear but many people say it works*

## OPTION A HEAD LICE SHAMPOO

### Kill the Head Lice and Remove the Nits

This option involves using two applications of a chemical head lice shampoo, 7 to 10 days apart. The shampoo kills the lice on the head but may not kill all of the nits therefore the nits need to be removed using a special "nit" comb or with your fingers. Head lice shampoos should only be used during active infestations.

Ask your pharmacists about head lice shampoos.

### STEPS TO FOLLOW

DO	REMEMBER
<p>1. <b>Check the heads</b> of all family members. Check hair, especially behind ears and back of neck for lice eggs (nits) – look for white to light brown oval specks "glued" to the strands of hair, very close (within 6mm or ¼ inch) to the scalp.</p>	<p>1. If one person in the family has head lice, there is an increased chance that other family members have head lice too. Dandruff can be flicked off the hair; nits are glued to the hair. Use good lighting when doing head checks.</p>
<p>2. <b>Only</b> family members with live head lice or live nits should be treated. <b>Carefully read and follow directions of the head lice shampoo.</b> Do not use conditioners for 1 week following treatment.</p>	<p>2. Unless you treat all family members who have head lice at the same time, head lice can be passed on from one person to another when heads touch. Conditioners can reduce the effectiveness of treatment.</p>
<p>3. <b>Remove all nits.</b> Gently use "nit" comb (metal works best) or use your fingers to pull nits from the single strands of hair. Rinse nit comb or fingers in a sink or bowl of warm water and wipe dry after each stroke.</p>	<p>3. Metal nit combs are available at your local pharmacy. If the nit comb tugs the hair, it may be upside down. <i>Experts differ in their opinion on the need to remove nits. Nit removal is included as it helps ensure less eggs will hatch, thereby improving the effectiveness of the treatment.</i></p>
<p>4. <b>Wash</b> clothing worn in the past 2 – 3 days, bed sheets and pillowcases and then dry in the <u>hot</u> cycle of the dryer. If articles cannot be washed in hot water or dried on a hot cycle in the drier, put the items in a sealed plastic bag for 10 days or place the sealed bag in the freezer for 24 hours.</p>	<p>4. There is <b>no</b> evidence that a major clean up of the house is necessary to get rid of head lice. <b>It is more important to treat the head lice and remove the nits.</b> Only items that have been in direct contact with the affected person need to be washed e.g. shirts, jackets, hats, towels, combs, brushes.</p>
<p>5. <b>Treat a second time</b> 7 – 10 days later. Repeat step 3.</p>	<p>5. A second treatment will make sure that any head lice, which hatch after the first shampoo, will be killed before they have a chance to lay any eggs. Two treatments and a follow-up check of the head with nit removal for 2-3 weeks is the best way to make sure head lice are gone.</p>
<p>6. If live head lice or new nits are found consult your Public Health Nurse or try Option B Wet Combing.</p>	<p>6. Wet combing breaks the life cycle of head lice by removing them before they are grown and able to reproduce.</p>

## OPTION B WET COMBING

### Remove the Head Lice and Forget the Nits

This option is cheap and safe but is time consuming and requires that the steps be followed **carefully and completely**. Wet combing is based on the life cycle of head lice. It focuses on removing the live head lice and does not require removing the nits from the head although some people still choose to remove the nits. Combing treatments are done every 3 – 4 days over a two-week period. This breaks the life cycle of head lice by removing them before they are fully-grown and able to reproduce

Talk to your Public Health Nurse if you require further information.

#### STEPS TO FOLLOW

DO	REMEMBER
1. <b>Wash</b> hair with ordinary shampoo and rinse.	1. Note: On average, a wet combing session takes about ½ hour per person.
2. <b>Apply</b> at least ½ cup of conditioner (any brand) to thoroughly saturate the hair. Use more if long hair. Do not rinse out the conditioner.	2. Untangle hair with a regular wide tooth comb. Wet conditioner will immobilize the lice.
3. <b>Comb</b> sections of hair using a “nit” comb (metal works best). Divide hair into small sections. Firmly draw the comb from the scalp to the end of the hair. After each stroke, rinse the comb in a sink or bowl of warm water, and wipe dry. Continue section by section until the entire head is done. Make sure hair stays wet during combing with conditioner.	3. Metal nit combs are available at your local pharmacy. If the nit comb tugs the hair, it may be upside down.
4. <b>Rinse</b> hair. Leave hair dripping wet. Repeat Step 3 combing <u>without conditioner</u> , until no lice are found.	4. Check the comb and your fingernails for head lice (you don’t want to give them a ride back to the head).
5. <b>Repeat</b> Step 1 – 4 every 3 – 4 days for two weeks.	5. Wet combing breaks the life cycle of head lice by removing them before they are full grown and able to reproduce.
6. After two weeks of wet combing if live head lice or new nits are found, try Option A Head Lice Shampoo or talk to your Public Health Nurse.	

#### DAYS TO WET COMB

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14



## ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS

There is not enough scientific evidence to support the use of the following methods, therefore Interior Health does not recommend them as treatment options.

- ◆ Olive oil
- ◆ Mineral oil
- ◆ Vinegar
- ◆ Mayonnaise
- ◆ Melted Butter
- ◆ Vaseline
- ◆ Robi comb
- ◆ Follicel
- ◆ Nuvo Lotion
- ◆ Shaving Gel
- ◆ Garlic
- ◆ Enzyme Treatments

## DANGEROUS AND UNDESIRABLE REMEDIES DO NOT USE

The following treatments are not effective and/or not safe.

Insect Sprays (Raid)  
Oil (WD40)  
Gasoline  
Flea Soap  
Alcohol  
Shaving the head

Dyes  
Bleaches  
Chinese Chalk  
Heat Directly on Scalp  
Kerosene

Essential Oils (Pine, Tea Tree, Thyme, Rosemary, Eucalyptus, Chick Chack etc....) are not recommended due to limited scientific evidence and possible toxicity concerns.

## EDUCATIONAL AND SUPPORT RESOURCES

Interior Health School Health Website: Head Lice Information  
[www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca)

BC Health Files: Head Lice Number 06 March 2007  
<http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/httoc.stm>

Harvard School of Public Health: Head Lice Information by Richard Pollack  
<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/headlice.html>

Canadian Pediatric Society Head Lice Parent Handout  
<http://www.cps.ca/caringforkids/whensick/headlice.htm>

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Guidelines and format adapted, with permission, from the Northern Health Authority "Is There a Louse in the House? A Head Lice Information Package for Parents/Family" August 2003